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5 May 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: South Vietnamese Elections

25X1 1. Attached is a memorandum prepared principally for my edification by [] one of my colleagues. I found it quite useful as a capsule rundown on where things now stand and I am forwarding it in the belief that you may find it similarly helpful. Elmer does this sort of thing very well.

25X1 2. While on this subject, I have been remiss in not thanking you before now for approving my request to have [] retirement date extended from 1 June through 31 December. The final, formal paperwork on this came through last week with your endorsement reflected thereon. Keeping [] on will make things much easier for us. I plan to replace him with [] an ONE officer now serving as the Saigon Station's chief estimator. He is a very solid citizen who writes extremely well and has by now acquired a very keen feel for and perception of matters Vietnamese. He will be returning in late October or early November. His assignment here has not yet been solemnized by all the formal papers required but I have taken private soundings with and secured the agreement of John Huizenga and [] so I anticipate no difficulty in completing this bit of piracy.

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

"Recent Developments in the South Vietnamese Election Picture"

1 - Elections ✓
1 - Gac Chouo ✓
1 - Memo To & From DC /

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5 May 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: George A. Carver, Jr.

SUBJECT : Recent Developments in the South Vietnamese
Election Picture

1. There has been only limited forward movement in the presidential election campaign during the past two months. None of the big three potential candidates has selected a running mate, and there are no firm clues as to their choices. The election bill is languishing in the lower house and may not be acted upon for another month or so. There has been some clarification of policies by the big three. The major development has been the widening of the rift between Ky and Thieu which virtually precludes another Thieu-Ky ticket.

2. Election Bill. The Senate in March knocked out the requirement that the candidates be sponsored by 40 assemblymen or 100 provincial councilors, primarily because of complaints that the provision was undemocratic. The lower house could restore it, but it would require a two-thirds vote which is unlikely. There is some talk of reducing the requirement to 30 assemblymen or 70 councilors. Thieu's original motive may have been to limit the contest to himself and Minh so that he could become a majority president. He may now feel that with Ky a probable candidate, additional candidates would split the pro-Minh, anti-Thieu vote and give him a plurality. Nevertheless, he wants some kind of limit on the number of candidates.

3. Running Mates. Thieu has stated that he will not announce his VP choice until after the election law is promulgated. Because of the strong public attacks by Ky which have angered Thieu, a Thieu-Ky ticket now seems unlikely, although Thieu has never specifically rejected this possibility. The fact that whoever becomes VP will be in line for the presidency in 1975 would also militate against the choice of Ky. Thieu apparently has been considering PM Khiem and ex-PM Tran Van Huong, according to clandestine reports, but he prefers a

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civilian and the latter is probably the leading prospect at the moment. Big Minh's advisors have mentioned numerous possibilities for Minh's running mate, but the leading candidates at the moment appear to be Senate Chairman Nguyen Van Huyen, Senator Vu Van Mau, Supreme Court Justice Tiet, and Saigon lawyer Vu Van Huyen. Ky has reportedly approached Au Truong Thanh, JGS Chairman General Vien, and Dr. Ho Van Minh, all of whom refused. He was at one time considering former Education Minister Nguyen Van Tho.

4. Other Candidates. All of Thieu's principal opponents in 1967 are now out of the picture. Dzu is in prison, Phan Khac Suu is dead, Tran Van Huong is too old, and Ha Thuc Ky has committed the Revolutionary Dai Viets to Thieu. There are no other prominent candidates on the scene at present, except for rumors of Truong Van Le, a Saigon publisher. Some of the "peace" candidates may be waiting for the passage of the election law before risking an announcement. The requirement in the election law that any candidate who does not achieve 20% of the vote will have to reimburse the government for his campaign expenses will tend to discourage capricious candidates (in 1967 the requirement was 10% and 7 of the 10 losers failed to reach that figure). However, there is speculation that there will be a few minor candidates. Names mentioned include perennial candidate Hoang Co Binh (a hawk), Ho Hue (Pharmacist), Tran Van Hieu (Dzu's running mate), Nguyen Dinh Quat (businessman), and Huynh Van Dao (former Minister of State).

5. Tactics and Policies. Thieu is visiting the countryside one or two times a week giving speeches in which he takes a staunch anti-Communist line. He is emphasizing the four "no's" -- no coalition, no neutrality, no territorial concessions, and no legal Communist Party. He is attempting to patch up his relations with the political parties and has promised financial support for selected lower house candidates of the FWP and the RDV. He has canceled income taxes for the military and civil service, suspended taxes on land-to-the-tiller recipients, and urged a speed-up in veterans' housing, and is replacing province chiefs of questionable loyalty.

Big Minh is trying to convey the impression that only he can bring about an end to the war through negotiations. He is publicly on record against a coalition government, but also against Thieu's position of wanting to "exterminate" the Communists. His policies as expressed in private conversations can be summed up as follows: a political solution to the war; no coalition; a role for the Communists in the political process; the withdrawal of U.S. forces but with a residual U.S.

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presence in enclaves; pro-U.S. neutrality; emphasis on social reforms. He says he will continue to prosecute the war vigorously until a solution is found.

Ky is attempting to portray a "dovish" image -- a middle course between Thieu's "total victory" and Minh's alleged "peace at any price." He says his aim is to prevent South Vietnam from falling to the Communists, to have a political solution to the war; to construct a healthy and just society, and to seek a cease fire followed by peaceful coexistence. He has indicated a willingness to change the constitution and allow the Communist Party to operate overtly. He sees some votes in anti-Americanism and is often critical of the U.S. He claims that he and Minh have agreed to cooperate -- which probably means they will concentrate on attacking Thieu.

6. Prognosis. Thieu has stated privately that if Ky runs, Minh will win, but it is doubtful whether Thieu was expressing his true feelings when he made the comment. Supporting this, however, is a report from Minister of State Hy who estimates following various field trips on behalf of Thieu that 60% of the junior officers and most enlisted men in RVNAF favor Minh. The Embassy in Saigon still thinks Thieu is the front runner in either a two-man or three-man race. However, his margin may be less now since he was probably hurt to some extent by the Laotian operation and by the recent smuggling activities of a number of pro-Thieu parliamentarians. The only province chief who has predicted Thieu's defeat in his province is Colonel Le Van Than of Thua Thien. He says the anti-Thieu Buddhist vote is too strong, the military and civil servants are not firmly in Thieu's camp, and he doubts the military civil apparatus in many of the provinces will be capable of or willing to deliver the votes for Thieu.

7. Miscellaneous. The Buddhists are promoting an astrological theory to the effect that Vietnam's status undergoes a drastic change every nine years -- that is, in 1945, 1954, 1963, and thus in 1972.



Vietnamese Affairs Staff

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